Utilisation Certificates for the year 1998-99 is awaited. Utilisation Certificate for the year 1990-2000 is not due yet.

(c) and (d) Audit of the expenditure for the year 1996-97 and 1997-98 has been carried out by Accountant General, Orissa. No financial irregularity has been observed.

Proposals for Hilly Districts of U.P.

†1432. SHRI MANOHAR KANT DHYANI: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) the details of approvals granted under section-2 of Conservation of Forests Act, 1980 during the last year in the hilly districts of Pauri, Chamoli, Tehri, Uttarkashi, Pithoragarh, Bageswar, Almora, Champawat in Uttar Pradesh;

(b) whether it is a fact that rubbles and sandstones are brought to these districts from plains hundreds of kms. away due to which the difficulties of common men are rising, besides manifold rise in the cost of Government construction work;

(c) if so, whether Government would take steps to remove this disparity; and

(d) if so, by when and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) A total 66 proposals of the hilly districts of Pauri, Chamoli, Tehri, Uttarkashi, Pithoragarh, Bageswar, Almora and Champawat in Uttar Pradesh have been approved under section-2 of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 during the last year *i.e.* 1999. The details of these are at Annexrure-I [See Appendix 190, Annexure No. 21]

(b) to (d) There is no ban on collection of rubbles, sand stones etc. from the river bed in forest areas situated in either hill or plain. As the collection of rubble, sand etc. from the river beds located in the forest areas, is a non-forest activity; prior approval of Central Government under Section-2 of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 is required to be obtained by the State Government.

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†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

During the last year *i.e.* 1999, total four proposal for collection/ mining of rubbles and sandstones were submitted by the State Government from the said eight hilly districts under Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. Out of these four, three are under consideration of the Ministry and one proposal has been rejected on 8.10.1999 as the proposed activity would affect wildwife and its movement in that area. However, on the request of State Government for re-consideration, certain map/information has been asked from the State Government.

Threat to Forests by Growing Population

1433. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that as per report of the United Nations Population Fund-India, presented on World Environment Day, the growing population, changing life style pattern, as well as poverty threaten our forests;

(b) whether forest cover declined from 72 mil. hectares in 1987 to around 63 mil. hectares in 1997;

(c) whether even, though the decline has been checked, the quality of our forests continue to deteriorate; and

(d) if so, what action Government have taken on this report?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BABU LAL MARANDI): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) No, Sir. The forest cover of the country has declined from 64.08 million hectares to 63.72 million hectares in the period from 1981—1983 to 1995—98.

(c) Yes, Sir. However, as per the State of Forest Report, 1999, a marginal improvement of density of forests has been observed in the period 1995 to 1998.

(d) Various important actions taken by the Government for conservation and development of forests are as under:

(i) Afforestation programmes are undertaken by State/UT Governments from their own resources as well as with financial assistance from Government of India.